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Argentina

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

PARTICIPANTS : Monsignor Kevin Mullen, First Secretary,
Nunciature, Buenos Aires
William H. Hallman, Political Counselor,
American Embassy, Buenos Aires
Yvonne Thayer, Political Officer,
American Embassy, Buenos Aires
F. Allen Harris, Political Officer,
American Embassy, Buenos Aires

DATE AND PLACE: February 8, 1979, American Embassy,
Buenos Aires

SUBJECT : Anti-Subversive Operation Against Catholic
Youth Organization

Monsignor Mullen presented the Embassy confidentially the following memorandum regarding a November 1978 anti-subversive operation carried out by the First Army Corps security forces:

(BEGIN TEXT): On November 1978 a group of heavily armed men, who declared themselves verbally to be from the Fuerza del Comando Conjunto, carried out an operativo in Villa del Parque, Buenos Aires.

They came to the area with a prepared list of young people whom they wanted to question in connection with subversion. All of the listed youngsters had in common the fact that they were members, some three years back, of the Casa de la Juventud run at the time by Rev. Rivas, a Redemptorist priest who has since left the priesthood; a second common characteristic is that they belonged to (but now no longer belong to) a catholic movement called "Cristianos para la liberación". (This movement has for long been considered by the military authorities as highly subversive). A military officer on the occasion of the operativo in question said in fact that they were seeking out a terrorist cell centered on these listed persons, who some years ago belonged to the "Cristianos para la liberación" but, my informant insisted, no longer today belong to it.

ARGENTINA PROJECT (S200000044)

U.S. DEPT. OF STATE, A/RPS/IPS

Margaret P. Grafeld, Director

☒ Release ☐ Excise ☐ Deny

Exemption(s):

Declassify: ☐ In Part ☒ In Full

☐ Classify as ☐ Extend as ☐ Downgrade to

Date _____ Declassify on _____ Reason _____

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The military involved in this procedure evidently had the addresses of the homes of these young peoples' parents, as they went first to them demanding with threats, verbal abuse and physical maltreatment (punches and kicks) to know where a son or a daughter now lived. With these new addresses they then proceeded to arrest between 60-70 youths (boys and girls), who were invariably manhandled and hooded before being taken away. In some cases if the young couple had a baby this was brought to the house of the parents. Many of the apartments were ransacked and robbed of their contents, including furniture. Often what was not stolen was broken.

Officially the military authorities denied afterwards that they were responsible for the operativo in question, so that all these young people were in the category of disappeared persons. However, in the course of the procedure an officer attached a notice to one door officially announcing (with seal and signature) the operativo of the Fuerzas Conjuntas. This was photographed and enlarged and presented to the authorities who then admitted responsibility for what had happened.

Thereafter, the detained youngsters were released little by little (apparently being taken by car or other vehicle to some place in the city by night and being left there to find their way home); these releases commenced on 21 December, continuing into January so that presently only two remain still in detention: Fontanella a married youth and Vacaro, a young married girl who is expecting a baby soon.

While in detention (a possible place of detention has been given as the Escuela Mecanica de la Armada) all were apparently maltreated and tortured (blows, threats and picana are some of the methods alleged to have been used). Those released, however, are so frightened of the experience they've had that they are reluctant to talk of it. Besides each one has been given a telephone number to which he is obliged to telephone each day to say where he is and what he is doing. The main thrust of questioning under torture was the church and subversion. (END TEXT).

Additional Comments

Monsignor Mullen said that in past discussions with church officials, Army officers had described the catholic youth movement "Cristianos para la liberación" as a subversive

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organization. Mullen noted that the two catholic priests, Fathers Gazzar and Carlos Bustos, who founded the movement, disappeared in 1976 and were presumably killed.

Mullen also suggested that Cardinal Aramburu had not played an important role in pressuring the First Corps to release the catholic youths.

Bishops' Statement

Mullen reported that at the last Army General Officers meeting a report had been presented analyzing the Argentine Bishops Conference November statement on peace in Argentina. Mullen noted that the Bishops' low-keyed complaint of the continuation of abductions, torture and disappearances was found by the Generals to be moderate, balanced, and accurate.

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